

**Statement of Senator Hollings  
on Air Traffic Control Delays Hearing  
September 14, 2000**

Good morning. I see that we are starting this hearing on time. I hope the air carriers appreciate that fact. We may need to break for a vote, but we will let you know as soon as we know. For those of you that fly, you can see that we run things a little differently here. We use real clocks, relatively real, but flexible schedules, and try to keep you informed.

Pick up any major newspaper this summer, and the headlines read  
“Summer’s a Bummer on land or in the air” - USA TODAY, August 21.

“Crises for Air Traffic System: More Passengers, More Delays” - NY Times, September 5.

“The Airlines; Less Regulation Won’t Fly” -- Business Week, August 7.

Even the London Sunday Times did a piece on “Long Delays on US Flights”.

We have graphs, charts, and numbers to demonstrate that things are bad. We don’t need them, however. All you need to do is look at the letters we get, or fly through one of the mega-hubs. Air carrier on-time performance was one of the worst ever recorded for June, at 66.3%.

A few weeks ago Secretary Slater called the entire industry in to talk about solutions, and I want to hear from him today. I know that Administrator Garvey has said that there is no one silver bullet to fixing the delay situation, and she is right. It is airport capacity, it is carrier service, it is new air traffic control equipment, it is new routes being designed by the FAA and industry, and it is money. We have the management, we have FAA reforms -- a new Chief Operating Officer for air traffic, and a board to work with the COO, and so on, but change will take time.

For years, we have underfunded the needs of the aviation system, and it is finally coming to haunt us. We let the Airport and Airways Trust Fund surplus be used for everything but aviation, shortchanging our airports, travelers and the FAA. I asked the then FAA Administrator Alan McArtor for a plan to spend money for airports. To meet the needs, not the political needs, or OMB’s needs, but the real needs.  
I never got that plan.

A few years ago, the Committee sat down with the FAA, Mitre, GAO and others to take a hard look at the needs of the air traffic control system. Everyone knew there wasn’t enough money. We had a chart that was used as part of that process that showed how much was needed, how much the FAA was going to get, and the projected funding the President’s budget would provide. Unfortunately, we did not fix the funding problem until this year. We now have a set amount of money put aside solely for aviation -- we will have an additional \$1.3 billion for airport grants, and about \$700 million for air traffic control equipment in FY 2001, compared to FY 2000. These monies should have

been made available years ago.

But that is history. Right now, we need to take a look at how to expedite airport construction, how to facilitate industry-FAA collaboration on delays, and perhaps call on the Secretary to hold scheduling committee hearings, similar to those held in the mid-80's, when we faced a delay problem. The carriers today cannot unilaterally disarm their schedules, and it will take a coordinated effort to sort through what can and can't be done to help alleviate delays for people.

Finally, I know that there are some advocates of, and one of our witnesses today will discuss, the concept of privatization. Air traffic controllers provide a basic safety function. They are at the heart of safety, directing planes day in and day out, carrying more than 650 million passengers per year. I know that some will argue "but other countries privatize ATC functions", but no where is the aviation system so complex. We have more operations in smaller areas than many of the countries today that have privatized systems. In addition, we keep making changes to the FAA -- its time we let the changes we have instituted be put to work, rather than change the desks before the new people arrive.